Field Notes
June 16, 2008
Johnny Saichuk

For the past couple of weeks I have received quite a few phone calls regarding dried out or "burned" leaf tips as shown in the photograph above. From what I can tell most of this can be blamed on the strong winds we had a couple of weeks ago that whipped the leaves causing them to dry out. In some cases the whipping action was severe enough to actually split the tips. Newer leaves that emerged after the winds had subsided are fine. It does not appear to be either nitrogen or potassium deficiency.

We also got calls about tillers dying especially on some of the hybrids varieties. I cannot explain the phenomenon based on the few plants I examined. It appeared to me the plants had begun to produce panicles in the majority of stems and that the tillers that were dying were actually parasitic to the rest of the plant. In that case the death could be a "normal" response of the plant to the nutrient demand. I am speculating here because I really do not know why it happened.

A similar process of senescence (death) of lower leaves occurs normally. The plant simply stops supporting leaves down in the canopy that can no longer intercept light and manufacture food. In nearly every case a single rice stem will support no more than 4 to 5 mature leaves at any one time. Lower leaves are shed as new leaves develop at the top.

On the preceding page are a series of 4 photographs of caterpillars. The top two photographs are of the rice stalk or stem borer. I have seen them referred to both as the stalk borer and the stem borer. The bottom left hand photograph is of the Mexican rice borer. The bottom right hand photograph is of a skipper or leaf roller.

Last week I showed a photograph of the sugarcane borer which has become our most common borer in rice. When we found the stalk borer in Jeff Davis and Calcasieu verification fields on Wednesday I had not seen one in so long I was concerned that it might be the Mexican rice borer. So far there are no official reports of the Mexican rice borer in Louisiana. It has been in Texas for several years and is gradually making its way toward Louisiana. While the Sabine River may provide a geographical barrier, there are many ways it could make it here. Most scientists studying the problem think it is not a matter of whether it will make it to Louisiana, but a matter of when.

The basic differences that can be seen without a microscopic examination are the lighter colored head capsule and the broken stripes down the side of the body of the Mexican rice borer. The stalk borer has a darker head capsule and the stripes are continuous. If you are suspicious about any you find put them in a plastic bag with some stem tissue to keep them alive and get them to your county agent.

Regardless of borer identity, control measures are seldom recommended for two reasons. First, to control the borer it must be picked up before it enters the stem. Second, we have not been able to document yield losses in Louisiana from them. Texas reports severe damage in some cases. The borer in the top right photograph is about a ¼ inch long. It is shown on my finger tip for size reference. It had not yet bored into the stalk, but would have within a day. At that stage we can control them with pyrethroids – sometimes. Once in the stalk it is impossible to get the insecticide to them.

Recent bulletins about severe borer (mainly sugarcane) in grain sorghum give me pause. A few years ago when there was a heavy borer population in corn and grain sorghum the borers moved from these hosts into rice as those crops matured. The good thing this year is that both of those crops are much later than they were several years ago and rice is on schedule so may not be as inviting a host. Most of our borer problems in rice have been from Avoyelles parish northward.

The skipper or leaf roller is common every year and we always get questions about them. The only time I can remember having to spray was when someone planted rice for crawfish late in the year and a heavy population of skippers defoliated it pretty heavily. Normally we ignore them. In that case we had to use a Bt compound because of the crawfish.

On this page are photographs that have appeared in earlier editions of Field Notes. The insect we called the Black Rice Bug has been identified as *Amaurochrous dubius*. The Black Rice Bug is *Scotinophora lurida* and is a problem in Asia. The critter we have is a close relative and looks nearly identical. Both are related to stink bugs and do emit an odor when disturbed. We do **not** have an official common name for our insect and are not supposed to use an already adopted common name.

This is **not** a new insect. It has been around for years. We just used the wrong common name.

The other is also a relative of stink bugs and is called the Burrowing Bug. Even though we found them on rice it is supposed to feed on organic matter and should not be a problem in rice. Dr. Hummel has some on rice plants to determine if they will feed on them.

Amaurochrous dubius

Burrowing Bug